

OF THE PAST BEARING ON
THE FUTURE AFTER THE WAR AS
THIS APPEARS THROUGH STUDY
OF THE PAST OR CONDITIONS
OF THE PRESENT

NUMBER I

THE
SIGNIFICANCE
OF GOTHIC ART

By

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The Significance of Gothic.

WERE I to speak to you tonight on Gothic architecture as an episode in æsthetics, or as a contribution to the science of archæology, I should fear that my tongue would cleave to the roof of my mouth and the words remain unspoken. Not that either subject is without value, for both are indeed of profound importance, but this is no time to think about art of any kind simply as an art, just as it is no time to produce art, for this mysterious and indispensable thing is both a sign and a symbol, and the reality it indicates is now non-existent. It is a sign of crescent life, or (when it stands poised on its loftiest peak before declension) of a long era of progressive development that has already reached its climax and has begun its long decline. It is a symbol of high truth and fine ideals ardently and bravely pursued; of a oneness in life that extends into every category of thought and action and involves all classes of men; a symbol of the best of any time, of spiritual truths recognized and sought and in some sense achieved. This is a description of what our own time is not, nor has been for some generations, therefore for the moment art is not for us, but the hard fighting and the soul-searching; the harsh choice and stern rejection, and the humble acceptance of those things which form the varied material out of which we shall build up a new society that will make inevitable, by its nobility, art that shall again speak to history of the beauty and the righteousness of the life that brings it into being.

When an era that has lasted almost its appointed time of five centuries (Constantinople fell, you will remember, in the year 1453) is breaking down in amazing ruin around our ears, and we are fighting blindly

to rescue such poor treasure as we can from the universal destruction; while we are as a matter of fact fighting for our lives against a peril more malignant and efficient than any the world has known since the Huns poured through the Alps to the sack of Italy and the ending of the Roman Empire, we are not in a mood to consider art in any form except as a part of the holocaust that is being offered up for the sins and the follies of five centuries. Those of us that can, fight, and they are of the blessed; those of us that are refused this glory can only write and talk, trying to find out how the world came to this pass, how we are to escape from the nemesis that pursues us; what we are to do, once the ghastly nightmare of retribution and purgation is accomplished, to prevent its coming again, at least for another cycle of five hundred years.

Of course the same sort of thing has happened before, and with a rhythmical exactness at five century intervals, for no definite era of society has ever lasted longer than this. Sometimes black barbarism follows, as after the fall of Rome; sometimes there is only a complete change in direction without any obvious catastrophe, as when the Renaissance (the first event in our own era of modernism) succeeded Mediævalism. Usually the centre of force changes from one people to another, as when Greece gave way to Rome, Rome to an Hellenic-Oriental State in the East and a miscellaneous collection of savage and transplanted Baltic tribes in the West. Sometimes, as in the XV century, the various peoples continue their corporate and national life, though with a complete change in orientation. In every case, however, two laws work with grim certainty, first, the complete, comprehensive and definite change every five centuries, second, the effecting of that change by a cataclysmic process. What is happening to us now has happened every five hundred years during the entire space of recorded history. Our own cataclysm seems more gross and horrible because it *is* ours, because it

is bigger, as the world is bigger, because it is complicated by all the acute mechanical intelligence and the incredible engines men never had before, because the destructive agency is centred in one nation, almost in one man, and because it came more suddenly than any other catastrophe in the past, at the exact moment indeed when nearly every soul in all the world of Western civilization boasted that the millennium had almost been reached and that at last man had become as the gods, omnipotent, irresistible, gloriously triumphant.

Well, we have seen the bursting of that iridescent dream. Imperial Rome was a century in dying, modernism bids fair to accomplish its destiny in a decade. What then? Those that can will fight to destroy the incarnation of modernism, — Prussia, her ideal and her works — and the rest of us must do what we can towards building up a new philosophy by which the new life is to come into being.

As Rome fell St. Benedict went out from the howling chaos into a cave in Monte Subiaco to prepare for the future that then seemed so dim and distant and almost hopeless. He, more than any other man or group of men, made possible the great civilization of Mediævalism, and what the world was for a thousand years, he made possible in his solitary exile in the Alban Hills. We also look forward, through and beyond the red hell of the battle fronts, towards a new world. It is here that the significance of Gothic shows itself. Black, tottering, blasted by flame and shell, rises against the smoke of battle, a great and solemn ruin, Reims Cathedral, the perfect exponent of Gothic art and of what this meant to those that built it, what it means to those that now destroy it, what it should mean to us who look through its empty tracery and its riven walls on towards a better thing than that which has now made it a great sacrifice, a burnt offering on the altar of God.

It is not my intention to enter into any technical analysis or indulge in any æsthetic rhapsodies of the

architecture of the Middle Ages. Instead I shall try to determine the great spiritual factors in Gothic art, show how these are put into visible form in the buildings themselves, and say why they seem to me the precise qualities that must be restored today in order that the new world that is to be built up on the ruins of a great failure may be a better and a nobler and a more beautiful thing. This is what I mean by the significance of Gothic.

Before we try to analyze this very definite and supreme thing called Gothic architecture, let us pass in review several of the crowning works in various lands and at different periods. In Notre Dame we see the art at its noblest and in its most classical form. Greece had nothing to show that is more classical in its serene proportions, its grave majesty, its noble self-restraint. Solemn and almost austere, it is yet a study in subtle variations, a masterpiece of magisterial scale. This is the work of men assured in their mastery, yet humble before God and working ardently for His glory. How different is Amiens, built only a few years later. Here exuberance of imagination, the expansiveness of poetic fancy, run riot in glimmering arcades, great portal-caverns of dim shadow, the flash and sparkle of crockets and pierced tracery, the vivid embroidery of niche and fretted pinnacle. And to the west, at Coutances, is another sea-change, the whole composition lifts into the air with the swift verticality of marshalled spears. Carving and sculpture give place to rank on rank of rigid vertical lines that seem to combine at last into slim spires that cleave the sky. This is Norman Gothic if you like, prototype of the Gothic of England, while the others are pure French of the old "Royautme." What this became, this Gothic of Normandy, when it was transmuted by English genius and translated into its own tongue, we can see at Peterborough. It lacks the practical concentration of the Norman, the clean structural logic of the French. It is dramatic, emotional,

pictorial, original; an effort at achieving an ideal rather beyond human power — therefore very English as contrasted with the pure logic of the French. A wonderful conception altogether, even if it is defective as structural expression, and all the English cathedrals and abbeys and little parish churches have this same quality of spontaneousness, this engaging diversity, this sense of being what they are because the people liked them so. Ely stretches sleepily along over rolling folds of land in the midst of fat trees; long, casual, without any particular design, but redolent of the soil, and English of the English. Even in their ruin, the more so because of their ruin, the devastated abbeys that Henry VIII made his spoil and the fee for base service, show full and clear the mingling of power and personality, spontaneousness and fertile invention irradiating the fine intellectual system of a perfectly organic and exquisitely articulated work. So with the parish churches; infinite in their variety, easy and colloquial in design or approaching in grandeur the greater abbeys and cathedrals, they are all a kind of material expression of society itself, not the self-conscious product of very specialized artists, but a precipitation in visible form of the character of the people that raised them in every hamlet of every county in England. And of France as well, for that matter, and Flanders, Spain, the Rhineland. The design varies almost without limit but in every case you feel the spontaneousness of it all, and a love for beauty that is equalled only by the power to produce beauty.

When you go inside, this sense of beauty becomes overpowering. At Chartres you find architecture at its perfection, and also the stained glass that is an art in itself and is so essential a part of Mediæval building. Elsewhere it is only architecture, quite bare and obvious, for the Reformation and the Revolution have swept the shrine clean of all the arts it once contained. Not a church is left undespoiled, except Roger's chapel in Palermo, St. Mark's, Venice, and in a measure the

Spanish cathedrals where the two great destroying agencies never came. Remember that in the XV century every church was intended to be, and was, a great composition of all the arts known to man; rich with altars and shrines, tombs and statues, of precious marbles and fretted stone and silver and gold set with uncut gems. Pictures were everywhere, the pictures now stolen and clumsily displayed in museums and the palaces of the multi-millionaire; tapestries now worth a king's ransom covered the lower walls, great frescoes of pure colour with gold settings, the walls above; while the columns, arches, vaults, statues were blazing with gold and colour. And every window a miniature apocalypse, flaming with saints and archangels of azure and ruby, purple and scarlet and mother-of-pearl.

As we see it today a Mediæval church is a dead thing, gray and sombre; ashes from which the fire has been burned away, and we think of Gothic primarily as form, whereas really I am not sure that colour and gold did not come nearer the heart of its creators. And this incrustation of living light was not confined to the interior alone, for all the carving and the rich mouldings and the countless statues of the exterior were once flashing with colour; crimson and emerald and ultramarine, while gold leaf flickered on every high-light until the eye was dazzled by the radiance. The greatest painters did not disdain this decorative work. Giorgione covered the palace walls of Venice with his golden visions, and in Flanders the Van Eycks and Hans Memling painted and gilded the statues and the carving of the town halls and guilds of Ghent and Bruges. Of all this hints only remain; in Exeter the tombs are still bright with their vivid colour, the Ste. Chapelle has had its hues restored, (and very badly done) some of the chapels of Reims were flaming with colour restoration before its martyrdom, and in Hildesheim many of the old XVI century houses still show their brave coat of colour and gold. If you can call to mind some gray and rather glaring cathedral

in France or England, with its blending of dull drabs, its chalky high-lights and its black shadows, and then imagine it transformed by the colour of St. Mark's, or the Capella Palatina, with windows like those of Chartres or the lost windows of Reims, you may form some faint idea of what a church was in the last years before the Reformation.

Everything, almost, has been lost, but it is true on the other hand that the universal desolation leaves one at liberty to consider the singular perfection of form and line. How supreme these were we may see in Bourges with its soaring shafts like spears lifted in salutation to the coming of Christ in the Mass. Or in Amiens, more daring still in its ecstatic aspiration. In that magical century from 1150 to 1250 the organism of Gothic reached a perfection never approached before or since, while the subtle perfection of line, the composition of beautiful forms, achieved its climax.

I should like to confine myself to a demonstration of this supreme quality of organism as it shows itself in the architecture of Mediævalism, for nowhere else is it so clearly manifested or of so great a degree of perfection. It is, however, only one element after all, and I have set myself the impossible task of touching on each of these and showing their significance in relation to Mediæval civilization. I will use it however as the first, and call it structural organism, and the thing it signifies is a clear logic and system of exact thought leading to a just and admirable sense of comparative values. You feel it at once in every plan; the scheme is of course a concentration of loads on exactly arranged points, with an intricate system of balanced thrusts taking the place of the old Greek static form where all weight is downward, and of the Roman and Romanesque methods of absorbing thrust by giant masses of inert masonry. The sheer architectural beauty of a Mediæval plan appeals chiefly to the architect, but even to the layman something of this beauty is revealed in the

beautiful patterning of such a plan as that of Chartres or Laon or Westminster. Similarly the balancing of forces in the system of buttresses and *arcs boutants* is perhaps primarily for the edification of the architect or the engineer, but any one can see in these dizzy scaffoldings of thin cut stone, that man is exerting his reason after a fashion very similar to that adopted by the greatest pure intellect that ever lived, St. Thomas Aquinas, and the result is the same; a masterpiece of clear reasoning, vivid, brilliant and exact. Every interior shows this, as Chartres for example, which while not the most astonishing is certainly the most judicious and explicit. Here shafts and arches and tracery and vault all reveal an articulation that is dumbfounding in its nicety and precision and at the same time expressed in the terms of pure beauty. Again, when we consider such a triumph as the spider-web of the chevet of Le Mans, we realize that no modern engineer has ever devised anything quite so ingenious and so commanding in its competence.

Now this organic quality in Gothic is simply the counterpart of the organic sense that grew out of feudalism, was formulated through a rediscovered and revitalized Roman law, and formed the solid foundation of Mediæval society. Historians depict the Middle Ages as more or less formless and chaotic, critics expend their enthusiasm on Gothic detail and sense of beauty, but really the Middle Ages were a period of logical organization that even tended towards over-articulation. Of course the human mind was constrained to work within the borders of its own limitations, but this was its strength, not its weakness. Not everything was subject to mental estimate and determination: the fatal error of the XVIII and XIX centuries was avoided, but the result was a very exact system of thought and an unique sense of comparative values. The men of the Middle Ages knew quite precisely what was worth striving for and what was not, while modernism has

reversed all estimates and abandoned itself to a whole-hearted striving to realize the non-essential. Proportion is a saving sense, not only in architecture but in life, and sense of proportion our Mediæval forefathers possessed in the highest attainable degree.

The second quality I would emphasize is not unallied with sense of proportion, and I will call it personal workmanship. Centralization is both Roman and Renaissance, and of this Mediævalism knew nothing. The unit then was neither the individual nor the State; it was the small group of human scale, where each man knew all the others, where interests were practically identical, and where law was made and justice administered by, and in the name of, the group. As I say, it was neither the individual nor the State that was the unit, but the family. Every abbey or cathedral or castle was the result of the coming together, to one end, of many of these groups; guilds, confraternities, sodalities, where initiative and originality were limited only by ability. The architect was simply the great master-craftsman; he determined the general design and saw to its honest carrying out; probably he acted in some sense as a co-ordinating force, but little of this was necessary where all the crafts were in the hands of really creative artists. The stone masons cut and laid up the material and carved all the ornament of capitals, mouldings, niches, pinnacles; the joiners worked out the roofs and the many fitments of wood. Guilds of sculptors made the statues, guilds of glass workers the windows, guilds of goldsmiths the sacred vessels, guilds of weavers the arras and the tapestry, guilds of founders the great peals of bells.

Now all this shows in the work. In any church where Reformation, Revolution and Restoration have left us any part of the old art we find the utmost variety of carving and of sculpture. On one doorway one craftsman has worked out his own fancy, on another his fellow of quite different personality. Here is sculpture of one

distinct type, around the corner something quite different. The same is true of glass and metal work and every other element that enters into the great composition. Reims cathedral was until recently a wonder of varied fancies where you could find how one man modelled his work on some Greek or Byzantine type, another on what was manifestly Roman. Here also were unmistakable portraits, of popular masters and workmen and of those held in disfavour; of some sculptor's mother or brother; of the fair lady of his choice, of the village shrew, the bishop, the gentry of the town. The result there and everywhere was sheer vitality, with a life and variety never found before in Greece or Rome or Byzantium, and never after, when the early Renaissance had once frozen into the formality of the new paganism. Of course nine-tenths of all this wealth of artistic genius is gone, recklessly and brutally destroyed by one set of low plunderers after another, chiefly those of the Reformation, and England has suffered here as grievously as France suffered under both Reformation and Revolution. We know however that England was easily first in its craftsmanship of every kind, and the inventories of treasure annihilated at the time of the suppression of the monasteries read like a chapter out of the "Arabian Nights." A shadow of all this glory remains in Henry's chapel at Westminster with its fretted stalls and tombs of dainty Italian inlay. What Canterbury was, and Lincoln and Glastonbury, we can only imagine, building up our vision out of the traditions that have remained of a splendour that was more than kingly in its opulence. Let it be quite clearly understood, there was then no division of labour after the modern fashion, no machine-made work of course, and no centralizing of initiative and invention in one man. Neither was there the wage system which has reduced our own industrial scheme of life to a point of unrighteousness where it makes inevitable the destruction that is close at hand. Labour then was capital, it was honourable,

and it was a joy in the doing, as is attested by every fragment of work that has been spared to our own time.

Closely associated with this is the element of originality. How characteristic this is you realize when you compare the art of Christian Europe from 1150 to 1500 with any of the art of the past. Only by tracing most carefully the hidden lines of development, both structural and artistic, as these thread their way back through Syria, Byzantium, Rome, Greece, can we link the art of Mediævalism with that of Paganism, and even so the sequence is vague and indeterminate. In its genius the Christian art of the North is a new thing, originality at its highest point. So was the civilization for that matter; the classical heritage of law and letters and science was of the slightest, and such as existed served only after it had been thoroughly transmuted by monastic religion and Northern blood. What really counted was the impalpable cultural tradition of a dead Roman dominion, and this was so potent that only where it had been operative was the new society able to achieve its perfection. Scandinavia, Brandenburg, Prussia, what passed for Russia, attained only a thin simulacrum of civilization, and even to this day we can see in these lands the fatal and irreparable lack of what, elsewhere, has made possible culture, character, and persistent nobility and clarity of purpose.

This vivid originality was the more perfect in that it was always exercised under law. Through the cathedrals and abbeys shines always a luminousness of vision, a spontaneousness of invention, a richness of imagination that reach through structural organism to general design and into every minute detail of ornamentation. Rome copied Greece in a superior, scornful sort of way; Byzantium grew up out of a mingling of Roman, Persian, Syrian elements, fused by a new Hellenism. Romanesque in Italy, Spain, Southern France, Normandy, the Rhineland, England, was a logical development of old inherited ideas touched by the fire of the North, but Gothic, while

a quick evolution from Norman origins, was revolutionary in character and absolutely, in this essential quality, without precedent. Never was there such liberty of action; it was the precipitating in material form of a new and enormous spiritual impulse and a new and unparalleled racial force. Yet every individual action was co-ordinated towards one end with a persistence and single-mindedness greater even than the purely artificial and self-conscious propaganda of the amateurs of the Renaissance. It was the exact antithesis of anarchy. Why? Simply because law was recognized and law ruled, quite as completely as in Rome itself. Moreover there was equal unity of idea in society itself, in religion, philosophy, education, social action. Liberty was a mania amongst the Mediævals, and it was they who laid all the foundations of such liberty as men have possessed ever since, but they knew, as we do not, that liberty means obedience, precise and highly articulated society, communal action as opposed to individualism. Knowing this they produced the greatest unity, achieved by and expressed through liberty and individuality, history has thus far recorded.

Out of this passionate sense of liberty, made real and secure by obedience, we approach the fourth salient quality of Gothic, and that is its unvarying nobility. There is nothing of vulgarity, of the common, we find so often in Roman art, nothing of those ignoble qualities that degrade the work of the later Renaissance, nothing of the dull meanness of the XVIII century. Whether you consider the very early Gothic, as of Noyon, the high adventure of the XIII century culmination, or the fantastic emotionalism of the decline, it is all noble, exalted, proud in its serene dignity and poise. There is nothing of insolence in this pride and nothing posed or self-sufficient. The vast and magniloquent erections of Rome blazon her wealth, her arrogance and her power, but the cathedrals of France and Spain, the abbeys of England, the civic halls of Flanders and Champagne are

without boastfulness, their grandeur is that of a dominating devotion and a sense of what is fitting to express the highest aspirations towards the highest reality.

This does not militate in the least against the human touch; the sly skits on princes and ecclesiastics that sting now as they stung then; the personal love of the carver for some flower or little animal immortalized in chiselled stone; the humourous rebus and the clever cryptogram, the grotesques of every sort, some of them passing the verge in their broad and questionable jokes. As a matter of fact I am inclined to think that actual nobility rather implies these casual and colloquial touches, for it is only the smug puritan who strives always to exist on an exceedingly high plane, and who cannot possibly produce anything in the least noble in manners or art or life. Nobility is based on a genuine humanism which it accepts implicitly, and humanism without humour is an empty fiction. These men were men first of all, and these women were women first of all, and they never forgot the fact or tried to blink it. Work and worship, love and fighting, were all good things, to be followed ardently. Honour and the pledged word, courage, fortitude, charity were simply things that men and women were bound to by the law of their existence. A sin that reacted on one or two was much less heinous than an offence against the community, and the breaking of the king's law, or even the racial custom, was far less blameworthy than the breaking of the law of God or an offence against spiritual truth. What these cathedral builders had — and by that I mean the whole community, not the actual workmen — was sense of proportion, and this is really at the bottom of this nobility that marks the cathedrals themselves. During all the great period there was nothing too much at any point, and no stressing of non-essentials. Note how perfectly this is expressed in such a thing as the facade of Notre Dame or the interior of Chartres or the west front of Wells. Here is proportion, serene and secure, without over-emphasis or exaggera-

tion. All the parts play together smoothly and perfectly like the human body and the result is a nobility as great as that of the statue of an athlete or the Venus of Melos.

I do not find any element of nobility in St. Peter's, and this is natural, for the Renaissance had as viciously reversed a sense of proportion as we have, but it covers every Mediæval church like a garment, whether it is a vast cathedral or some small structure like the Ste. Chapelle. The Middle Ages had nothing of imperialism about them; Cecil Rhodes or J. P. Morgan or Kaiser Wilhelm would have perished of inaction and lack of employment. Bigness was not an obsession, rather the reverse, and they possessed the secret of making the materially small thing spiritually great. You see, they had sense of scale, and scale is proportion, and proportion is a just estimate of comparative values,—the thing above others in which Mediævalism excelled.

It was this just appreciation of what was inherently valuable and therefore worthy of emphasis that led to the fifth quality to which I would direct your attention, magnificence. Every great church of this time, and every little church as well, was as magnificent in its ornament and furnishing, and as opulent in lavished labour of myriad hands, as was humanly possible: even where superlative richness could not be attained the church was in any case the finest material fabric in the community. Money was poured out unstintingly, hundreds of men gave their labour ungrudgingly that every part should be perfectly finished and gloriously bedecked. Generation after generation gave new ornaments, new decorations, new enrichment of shrines and chapels and porches, until the very day when the Reformation came to dash everything breakable into ruin and to convert the gold and jewels into cash. I cannot keep my categories distinct; sense of proportion dictates this quality of magnificence, realization of the fact that if the Church was what it claimed to be, what men then believed it to be, and what it meant to them in every moment, every

affair of their lives, then, however men might live at home, the churches were the very places where expenditure could not be stinted and where magnificence should reign unchecked. From the Edict of Toleration by Constantine until the day when Luther nailed his theses to the door in Wittenberg, this had always been the Christian idea. Not even the best was good enough for God, but this best, poor as it was, could be glorified by labour and sacrifice, and then offered in love and devotion. It is only since the Reformation that churches have been scamped that houses and shops and clubs might be richer, and that poor work was accepted because it was cheap, finished only where it could be seen because this was cheaper, and that imitations in stamped metal and papier maché, plaster and artificial stone and fake marble have been greedily accepted because they were cheapest of all.

Of course most of this magnificence has now departed except so far as some of the architecture itself is concerned. Reformation and Revolution have seen to it that the incredible art of the craftsman has been entirely obliterated, but there is magnificence still in the great churches, such for example as Westminster, which was only an abbey for less than an hundred monks, in the green fields outside the walls of London on the edge of what then was the clear-flowing Thames. The poor church has been grievously knocked about, despoiled, neglected, restored, cluttered with horrible marble effigies of worse XVIII century politicians and courtiers, but it is still a monument of magnificence.

I am disposed rather to lay stress on this quality, for it is quite antithetical to the ostentation of the Renaissance or the emulation of modernism. Magnificence does not mean doing things either for show or in rivalry; it is more akin to the old idea of *noblesse oblige*. As free citizens and good Catholics the men of the Middle Ages felt that they owed it both to the Church and to themselves that whatever was done should be of the most

splendid fashion. They had a real pride that prevented them from being niggardly, a sense of the proprieties that forbade their palming off the second-rate on God. They thought and acted in a large way, and this which I call magnificence showed itself in their philosophy and their chivalry and even in their fighting, just as it did in their architecture.

Naturally this all implies a resolute search for, and actual accomplishment of, beauty, which I will name as the ~~seventh~~ significant quality in Gothic. With very rare exceptions all Gothic is beautiful, wherever and whenever you may find it. So of course was Greek and Byzantine; so was not always Roman or Renaissance. At the present moment there is an entire school of architects and teachers who deny that there is any such thing as absolute beauty or that it is of any particular importance. Every one in the Middle Ages knew better. They were quite capable of recognizing beauty when they saw it, of creating it at any cost, and of appraising it at its real value. Not for a moment would I have you think that they favoured any such nonsense as "art for art's sake," or that they entered into the pursuit of beauty with the superior self-consciousness of the Renaissance, or into the acquisition of "High Art" with the intensive and pedagogical insistence of contemporary communities who are bound to have some art if they get it with an axe. What really happened was that for them beauty was an instinct, a sort of gauge of decency in life, and they rejected ugly things, refused the pursuit of ugly things, just because that sort of thing wasn't done. They wanted to do the best and to get the best because they were both free and proud, and the best always implied beauty, whether it was in their devotions to the saints, or in philosophy such as that of St. Bernard or St. Catherine of Siena, or in poetry and romance, music, sculpture, architecture and the so-called minor arts.

I suppose such a place as Laon or Palermo in the XIII century, Rouen or Malines in the XIV, Venice or

Winchester in the XV, or Bruges, Oxford or Hildesheim in the XVI century, must have been a thing of such beauty as we cannot even dream of today. I do not claim that the cities were scrupulously clean, but I fancy they would compare favourably with the cities of the XIX century. I admit the plumbing was defective, but that of the XVIII century was worse, and after all, plumbing is not necessarily the test of civilization, though others have held differently. We *do* know that personal cleanliness was rather a fad, and why perfumes had to be invented during the Renaissance. In spite of these defects I can safely assert that the cities of the Middle Ages were better places to live in than any typical mill-or coal-town today, and if then anything existed comparable in horror with some of the self-sufficient cities I happen to know in England and America, it was only in Dante's "Inferno" or in the Last Judgments of the Gothic sculptors. In spite of our automobiles and elevated railways and sky-scrapers and slums and factories and "associated charities" and bread-lines, we plume ourselves on our progressive cities, but I could show you in any great city dens and alleys and pest holes that would shame the most backward community of the Middle Ages.

Think for a moment of Oxford or Siena, Rothenburg or Chartres, within its protecting great walls set with tall towers. Innumerable churches crowded with works of art that would make the fortune of a modern museum, and with incessant services where music and ceremonial blended in a great drama. Palaces of marble and chiselled stone — it is of record that when the "Spanish Fury" wrecked Antwerp in the XVI century, five hundred houses of these two materials alone were destroyed, and Antwerp then was only a second rate town — the towering fronts of the homes of wealthy burghers, carved from top to bottom and covered with pictures and gold leaf; great guild halls like that of Ypres just destroyed by the Huns; gardens, courts, cloisters, market places, arcaded,

and with fountains and shrines, gay shops of all kinds, winding canals spanned by little bridges, — and no coal smoke, no tram cars, no automobiles. Well, the fancy balks at the task of re-creation, but out of scattered fragments and records it is possible to build up something that may at least give some faint adumbration of what once was before the dark days of coal and iron.

Bear in mind also that there were no “industrial suburbs.” From the top of the battlemented walls one could look down into the crowded city, all gold and colour and glimmering spires and turrets and dizzy gables, with all the people as gay as tropical birds, in their bright raiment, or, from the other side, into fields and gardens and groves that spread around like a green sea, broken only by the white towers of monasteries amidst their orchards, gray castles crowning hill and headland, and perhaps lines of pilgrims, religious processions with bright banners, knights in shining armour, or a band of spearmen, passing on the winding roads. Whether you like it or not, the world then was a world of rampant beauty, and it is no wonder that the ruins that remain to us should be of such beauty as was hardly before, and certainly has never been since.

Let me repeat; beauty is not something added, it is something necessary, fundamental, and any society that does not express itself in terms of beauty is society of the wrong shape that well deserves to be destroyed.

This all-penetrating quality of the Middle Ages was of its unique degree because it was the result of the intimate working together of an endless number of different arts, from iron forging to stained glass, from the making of songs and ballads to religious ceremonial. The perfect unity of a Gothic cathedral does not proceed from any imperialistic concentration of authority in any one person but from the communal action of all sorts of groups of vividly characterized individuals, inspired by one dominating idea. This is the seventh of the significant elements in Gothic to which I would call

your attention. It is perhaps the hardest for us to understand today. We were taught, in the years without art, that there was a sort of hierarchy of the arts, certain ones being "high" art, others "minor," or "industrial" or something of the sort, quite inferior to the others that were always quarrelling as to which in their own strict circle should be considered the greatest amongst them. Of this, Mediævalism knew nothing; the painter held no higher social position than the goldsmith, the maker of stained glass was quite on a level with the sculptor, the architect was only the master in his craft of building. I doubt if the word "art" was known; you only need a title when the thing itself is dead. What we call the art of the Middle Ages, or of any other vital period, for that matter, was simply what man produced under the impulse of strong emotion, for the expression of an inner ideal. To make it good it was necessary that it should be essentially beautiful, and that it should be perfect in its craftsmanship. Finally it had to take its place with consistency in the triumphant complex of all the arts towards which it was contributed.

This sense of unity, of the subordination of real individualism to the common good, is a quality that is no more lacking in Gothic art than it was in that of Greece or Byzantium, and it is a quality entirely absent from all modern art, in spite of the imperialism of the architect or other dominating force. Never was such individuality as shows itself in a Gothic cathedral, or such perfect unity, and you may apply the same statement to the civilization that brought it into being. The Church was the supreme unity and the one unifying force, and it held Europe together as even the Empire could not do. Of course there was plenty of fighting between feudal groups and feudal states, between princes and Popes, between one guild and another. So was there fighting in the enlightened XIX century, between political parties, between "big business" and trades unions, between financial magnates, and though in these latter days there

was less blood spilled, I myself rather fancy the earlier method, even with the broken heads, for until Mediævalism broke down into the Renaissance, there was more of honour and personal courage and heroism.

However this may be, life itself was a unity; religion, philosophy, action, all hung together, and in spite of a natural failure to achieve the ideal, the working theory was that life was a whole and not a filing cabinet arranged under a card index. Things were always getting misplaced; love got tangled with politics, religion was always becoming confused with adventure, science with dreams and romance (fancy that happening today!), philosophy with mathematics or games of skill. And the greater was the substantial unity because of this lack of mechanical system. It was all life, and life was as vivid as it was real.

Now see how this oneness shows itself in art. These cathedrals and abbeys and parish churches, these colleges and guild halls and manor houses and cottages, all seem to live even now, after their long martyrdom of spoliation and neglect, while the best of our own work is dead in spite of its logical consistency. Consider a State Capitol, — any State Capitol, they are all alike, only some are worse than others — some architect has reduced himself to the point of softening of the brain to achieve unity and coherency, and he has worked so hard his product is essentially dead; cold, dull, mechanistic, a series of vain repetitions; academically correct undoubtedly but enough to bore one to tears. Compare it with the Ducal Palace in Venice, which isn't very good Gothic I dare say but is eternally beautiful and as full of sparkling life today as it was when it was built five hundred years ago. Or consider Mont-Saint-Michel, built at odd times during five centuries and after as many fashions. Norman, — of the earliest — perfected Gothic, Flamboyant — of the latest, everything except Renaissance, it builds up like a great musical composition, and to this day, in spite of criminal restora-

tions and the cheap trippers that swarm across its infernal new causeway on screeching steam trams, it reveals a great unity that has been utterly lost under the sublime unifying process of modernism. And for a third example I commend to you Gloucester Cathedral. Purists will tell you that neither is this good Gothic, which I conceive to be a matter of no importance. It is absolutely beautiful in composition and detail and it has the highest unity, even if it does consist in an inner shell of solemn and ponderous Norman camouflaged by some of the loveliest stone embroidery ever produced. This thing rose white and jewel-like in obedience to a single impulse that drove people and masons and my lord bishop alike, and in the very last days when unity of impulse was possible. Straightaway comes Henry Tudor and his spoliation of monasticism, the Reformation and the downfall of religion, the industrial revolution and the collapse of society — *et apres?* — the XVII century with the dominion of ignorance, the XVIII century with the tyranny of the *nouveaux-riches* in politics, the XIX century with its inevitable catastrophe, in the midst of which we are now engulfed.

What was the secret of this essential unity that is like a golden cord on which are strung the varied jewels that make up the Mediæval synthesis? I think there can be no doubt about the answer: it was the recognition of religion as an absolutely real and equally necessary fact. No more than beauty was it something added (as it has been of late), it was of the *esse* of life. Men were neither scornful of it nor ashamed of it, it was their proudest possession, and they not only lived in it but boasted of it, and when they wanted to do something really worth while they went to Mass or built a church or spent their labour in making something beautiful for the adornment of that church. You see, they understood as we have not, that the real and eternal things are spiritual, and that only material things are transitory, and though they delighted in material things

— fighting and adventure and devising new philosophies and making beautiful things of all sorts and building cities and trying to govern them, they managed to see through them all a certain ideal, spiritual quality, and so they succeeded in raising them to a more or less lofty plane and building them all together into a passably coherent whole; at all events into something more coherent than modernism achieved until, in the first decade of the present century, it succeeded in voiding life altogether of spirituality and making it a consistent glorification of the material.

Of course before Mediævalism religion had always been the motive power behind every great work of architecture (except during the Roman Empire), but it was religion with a very notable difference. Sometimes it had been a gross and terrified superstition, sometimes an intellectual abstraction, sometimes, as in Byzantium, a veiled mystery surrounded by the gorgeous and the hieratic, sometimes but little more than the cherished but hidden hope of the oppressed, as it was in the days of the early Christians. As soon as the Northern races took hold of it, it blossomed like a flower, and all that was in the original Christian deposit, of the personal and the poignant, came to the surface, and the infinite possibilities of the Christian revelation were worked out to the full. It is the dogma of transubstantiation, the cultus of our Lady, and the doctrine of the Communion of Saints that made Mediæval Christianity what it was and gave to Mediæval society its scintillating personal quality, to Mediæval art its supreme beauty and its everlasting appeal.

This personal touch you feel in every work of art of the time, and that is why the churches and pictures and statues, the music and the poetry and romances rest in a class by themselves. Nothing could be less formal and less abstract than the little churches of France and Flanders and England. They mark the dominance of a real religious ardour, but as well they

are colloquial, intimate and personal. It was ardent love for Christ, passionate affection for our Lady or for some special one of the thousands of Saints under whose personal protection the church or town or guild had been placed, that determined the quality and the beauty of each church, not a cold mental concept of an intangible Divinity, minatory and aloof, between whom and fallible man there was no possibility of the mediation of the priest or the intercession of a Saint. The same was true of monastic architecture, only here the feeling was if anything intensified through the greater recollection possible in the religious life and the closer bonds of a community. As for the cathedral, here a whole city came together to exhibit its sense of united service, and into this came the pride of citizenship and the determination that for the glory of the town God should be honoured no more sumptuously in any other place. If you want to see how personal and intimate the whole thing was, read Henry Adams' "Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres," for there in the description of the building of a great cathedral, and in Mr. Adams' astonishingly sympathetic presentment of the attitude of the people of the Middle Ages to the Mother of God, you will see that whatever their failure to live up to their ideal, the ideal itself was both nobly exalted and the close personal possession of every man, woman and child.

These then are the things that seem to me significant in Gothic and therefore in the civilization of which it was the showing forth. Structural organism, signifying a logical system of thought leading to a just sense of comparative values. Personal workmanship, the result of an industrial system that through its guilds guaranteed status to the workman, and justice, together with the highest level of product. Originality, which is liberty under law. Nobility, the fruit of a proud sense of communal integrity. Magnificence, showing forth the idea of sacrifice for the glory of great things. Beauty, the recognition of a real value, both sensuous and spiritual

in its nature, above the material. Synthesis of all the arts ever known, with several new ones added, which is symbolical of the essential unity of life. Religious significance, proclaiming the supremacy of God, the reality of the Catholic Faith, the intimacy of spiritual relationship with the holy dead from the Lamb slain on Calvary and His Virgin Mother to the last mourned in palace or in hovel.

To the arts of this age of faith and works we were returning in the years before the war, and to the thing itself we must return in the days that follow the war; not for the purpose of recreating an artificial Mediævalism as we were trying to restore an artificial Gothic, but in order to retrieve some of the things we have lost and so build up a new and a better civilization. For my own part I have no doubt that the qualities of character and of society that produced Gothic art were more sound and wholesome than those we progressively accepted, from the Renaissance on, and that resulted in the almost total destruction of all sane architecture (not to speak of the other arts) and then in the manufacture of the art of modernism. Understand, please, that I am not claiming that our own civilization was bad because it produced no art of its own, or at best a very poor substitute, but rather that this art is a sort of touchstone that revealed the quality of our culture even before the war came to enforce this judgment by its own unescapable verdict. Some of us could have told you before the war that ours was a silly sort of civilization at best, but you would not have believed us, for we were only poor fools who played with art. The revelation of war is less lightly disregarded.

What then is the application to our own system of life of the things that we have found to be significant in Mediævalism, as we see it through the revealing art that was its best self-expression? I can hardly more than note the eight points I have tried to make clear, for time is altogether lacking either for demonstration or argument.

A better sense of comparative values, seen through the perfect structural system of Gothic art. Surely it is evident that the catastrophe that has overtaken us is primarily due to the fact that for almost five centuries we have tended increasingly to emphasize, to desire, and to pursue the unimportant, even the insignificant, to the exclusion of the things that really matter. We have loved words rather than realities: methods rather than results, formulæ that took on a scientific or intellectual or political significance when behind was no reality. We have made for ourselves a culture of catch words even while we were giving ourselves over to an entirely comprehensive pursuit of material things—money, power, efficiency, social recognition, and the result has been a sort of morbid idealism plus an equally morbid materialism. We have lost our standards, or, which is worse, confused them. To get back a sound basis of judgment, to discover again what is really worth while, and what is worthless, is the first task that confronts us; not when the red hell of battle is ended, but *now*, in the midst of it all, that we may be prepared for the event.

One of these revisions of judgment, with its issue in a very drastic form of action, will come in the case of our industrial and financial and economic system so much admired in the days before the war. This was the exact antithesis of what held under Mediævalism, and in the guild system of those days we shall find the only possible basis on which we can build in the future. The bloody contest between imperialism and democracy extends far beyond the political sphere, and its more revolutionary victories must be won on the field of economics. The Middle Ages produced the nearest approach to real democracy the world has known, and nowhere more completely than in industry. From an insane imperialism, in government, in finance, in trade and manufacture, we must return to the unit of human scale, to a merging of capital and labour, rather than their increasing sever-

ance under an even more drastic governmental control leading in the end, through state socialism as well as through capitalism, to the Servile State. In spite of its criminal folly, its nightmare reversals, its crazy anarchy, there is in Russia today at least a recognition that the Revolution is the important question for the future, and the very fact that there they are sacrificing all the potential good therein for the sake of exalting ignorance, immorality and incapacity, is profoundly significant. They have turned from the object lesson of the great Christian past in order to invent a baseless scheme of their own, and the whole ramshackle fabric is falling about their ears.

What the Bolsheviki are trying for is liberty through the abolition of all law, human, moral and divine, just as Germany is trying to gain world power after exactly the same fashion. If you remember, I stated that the Middle Ages meant liberty *under* law, and because of law: the showing forth of which was the vast originality of its art which was yet as bound by law as was the art of Greece. They had then very few *laws*, and they are to be congratulated on that fact, but they had *Law*, and that is a very different and much more important matter. A law-making body such as an American city council or state legislature or national Congress would have brought the Middle Ages to an end in complete disaster in a very few weeks. Enforcing the law, then, meant simply obtaining justice, an idea quite foreign to modern legislation, and though they frequently failed in their efforts, their object was laudable. To their standpoint we must come, recognizing that the sole object of man-made law is *justice*, not profit or expediency; that custom is also law since it is the cumulative judgment of the community or race, and that there is also Divine Law which is neither the result of human legislation nor yet of psychological evolution but is given man through Revelation. It is only under this threefold law that liberty is possible.

Laws lead to selfish individualism. Law to that great communal sense which transforms man from an isolated unit into an individual part of a group, whether this is the family, the community or the State. That nobility in all the art of the Middle Ages, on which I laid such stress, is the fruit of this communal sense. Nobility in architecture is that which shows forth a certain fineness of feeling, sense of obligation, greatness of purpose, pride in doing things well — honour, in a word, amongst those who create. It is a communal rather than a personal thing, and its simplest formula is "noblesse oblige." It is not exactly what gives its glory to Greek art, it is quite absent from the insolent majesty of Rome; it escapes us in Byzantine art with all its splendour, and during the Renaissance it was subject to a progressive evanishment until Alberti was followed by Vignola and Palladio and they by the hoboos and bounders whose language was the Rococo and the Baroc. In Gothic art it is universal, and it speaks of a greatness of soul and a breadth of sympathy and a sense of what is eternally valuable and fitting that we must regain even at the cost of all we had treasured during the last few hundred years.

Nobility merges on occasion into magnificence, and this sense also we lack, though it may seem strange to say it. I do not mean, however, the "magnificence" that gave his title to Lorenzo di Medici, and still less the similar quality that is the peculiar possession today of the multi-millionaire whether he is individual or corporation. The private gallery, built at incalculable cost and rich with the spoil of desecrated churches and suppressed monasteries; the sumptuous church reared on "the most expensive land in the city, Sir" and paid for by a group of captains of industry; these are not types of the magnificence that is created to do honour to God or His Saints or to give an added glory to a proud city, and created at the cost of great sacrifice simply because the object was worthy of the highest honour

and only the best was acceptable. Of this type of magnificence we have known little, and this we must acquire again. Perhaps we shall, through the war, for at least we are confronted by a thing that demands sacrifice, and exalts it, giving the lie to the fat hedonism of the physical life, and the pragmatic philosophy and the comfortable religions of the era the war now brings to an end.

Yet magnificence is not the essence of beauty, it is indeed, in this case, something added. Beauty costs even less than ugliness, the which is a truth not inculcated in the art-education of the day. Beauty, as I said, is a real thing, definite, absolute and determinable, and it is not the personal reaction of the individual. Only Prussia holds there is no difference between right and wrong, and some of us had shown the extent of the Prussianizing process when we held that there was no difference between beauty and ugliness. Desire for beauty, and power to accomplish beauty, and ability to know and to reject ugliness, are marks of true culture, of decent civilization. This is one of the fatal counts against modernism. The last century had a perverse passion for the hideous. Our architecture from 1830 to 1880 was the meanest and the ugliest ever known. Our other arts were negligible (barring a few great men like St. Gaudens and Sargent and Edwin Booth) until a few years ago when the pentecost of ugliness was poured out over them in the shape of impressionism and cubism and "advanced" music and *vers libre*. Our clothes were ugly, our politics were ugly, our education tended towards an even greater ugliness, our newspapers were and are triumphs of the preposterously hideous, and our cities are the worst of all. And think of the piteousness of Art Museums and art schools and lecture bureaus of æsthetics trying to uphold and advance the idea of beauty in such an environment!

We don't want "art for art's sake," or anything of the kind. We want art because it is beauty, and because

beauty is a sign of right feeling, right thinking and right living. Until we get it back, as the possession of all the people, as an instinct, not as the hoarded possession of a few hypersensitive and highly trained experts, we shall have no civilization worth talking about.

And we shall get it when we reform our scheme of life, not before. When this comes, as it will, though God knows how long it will be before the day arrives, we shall realize that there are not four "Fine Arts" and a hoard of poor relations, kept discreetly in the background and called "minor" or "industrial" arts. They knew all this in the Middle Ages. To them art simply meant doing things right, making them beautiful, and perfect in craftsmanship. That was enough. When we can see an "Arts and Crafts Society" with a woodcarver or metalworker for president, and painters, architects, sculptors, poets and actors as humble members, and when the great portrait painter does not disdain to paint and gild a statue, or the architect refuse to go on the works with his chisel to help a journeyman carve a capital, we shall be near the attainment of something approaching Mediæval capacity and, you will say, the millennium.

Well, the millennium it may be; the thousand years after the last great regeneration of society in the year one thousand, as that came just an equal space of time after the Incarnation. It was the Divine mercy of a vast religious revival that made the Middle Ages, as it was the Divine mercy of the Christian Revelation that marked the thousandth year before. For five hundred years we have been trying (with considerable success) to get rid of religion altogether, and now we see what the price is we are called upon to pay. Religion in the Middle Ages was the root of everything. It interpenetrated life in all its aspects and fused these into unity. It was not a secret optimism not to be spoken of for fear of smirching its exceeding refinement. It was not a collection of highly intellectualized formulæ

embodied in XXXIX Articles or Westminster Confessions or "Keys to the Scriptures" or such like. It was a living thing; a confidence, a hope, and a way of life; quite clear in its elements, intimate and every-day, universally accepted because its appeal was universal. Finally it was expressed through the most poignant and beautiful symbols ever devised by man or revealed to him. High Mass in a Gothic cathedral in the XV century was probably the greatest and most comprehensive work of art man has produced. It was beauty in every conceivable form, raised to the highest power, but it was a vast symbol, a synthesis of innumerable symbols. Here was the strength of the Middle Ages, as here is our weakness. The wisest thing I have heard said about Russia since the Revolution was said by Mr. Charles R. Crane; that Russia was ruined because she had lost her symbols. Without these man cannot live, neither can society endure. We have rejected them, turning back to the material thing as complete in itself and an end in itself. That way lies destruction, for unless we can glorify the material thing by seeing it as a symbol of a spiritual truth, unless we can see the spiritual verity existing in and attainable through material things, then we become empty materialists, and for such there is neither mercy nor redemption.

Out of the welter of blood and ruin; out of the chaos of crumbling superstitions and shattered institutions; out of the Armageddon where an old righteousness rises from its lethargy to contend in arms against an old horror newly reinforced and magnified for the subjugation of the world, comes a great hope and a flaming dawn of opportunity. A new world is to be built up on the ruins of the old; our folly is shaken before us that we may see, and no longer can we plead either ignorance or lack of warning.

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